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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by Women’s International Peace Centre, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Women's International Peace Centre, as an organization dedicated to collaborating with women and survivors of armed conflict, focuses keenly on empowerment and how it should be approached to bring about sustainable peace and development, especially in post-conflict communities. Women's empowerment is a complex issue, and its multifaceted nature means that there isn't a singular solution. Violence is intertwined with economic, political, self-perception, and cultural dimensions. Addressing the economic aspect requires consideration of political and social factors, creating an interconnected web of challenges that must be collectively addressed.

The Fourth World Conference on Women and the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action bear great significance for the rights of women and girls affected by armed and other kinds of conflict. They not only put the spotlight on issues of concern for women affected by armed conflict but also task all actors including governments, the international community and civil society to focus their action and resources on changing this reality. The same actors were given the responsibility to define and implement accountability mechanisms, to track and ensure progress in achieving the ambitious vision of the Beijing process and its outcomes. The Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action highlight the grave and massive human rights violations women and girls suffer during and after conflict or displacement as well as the life-long social, economic and psychologically traumatic impact. It addresses the experiences and gender-specific challenges faced by refugee, displaced and migrant women whose central role in post-conflict economic recovery is often minimised.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reflects this through goals 5 and 16 focused on achieving gender equality as well as peaceful and inclusive societies. In the past 25 years, and with the boost of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, related resolutions, regional declarations and National Action Plans, some progress has been registered in increasing women's representation and participation in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding, humanitarian action and crisis response. However, the progress has been slow, the numbers remain low, their influence is limited and the barriers to women's meaningful engagement are largely under-addressed within institutions of power.

Women and girls, particularly in Africa, are well recognized for their diverse roles as farmers, community mobilisers, caregivers, small business owners and consumers, among other critical parts they often play. While the contributions of these women and girls to the social and economic advancement of their communities and nations is widely acknowledged, this has yet to translate into significant gains in terms of empowerment and gender equality for these critical agents of progress. Fragile, conflict and post-conflict contexts present specific challenges for gender equality and for the prospects of women and girls' economic empowerment, particularly following a prolonged absence of peace and security. Women in post-conflict settings experience diverse forms of sexual and physical violence, which thereafter physically and psychosocially limits their ability to return to their primary work in agriculture, to seek decent employment opportunities or to experience the social-economic resilience requisite for their empowerment. In the absence of trauma management support to address the psychological impact of war on these women and girls, their ability to experience empowerment is significantly curbed.

Furthermore, women and girls' limited access to productive resources such as land which is a key element for their empowerment is also magnified following armed violence as it often results in the death or disappearance of husbands and fathers, who are the gatekeepers for access to clan land and in some cases, finances. Consequently,

a significant portion of women and girls affected by conflict tend to be war widows, female household heads, mothers to 'clanless children' and half widows. These women and girls shoulder a greater burden as caregivers but are often further marginalized due to discriminatory cultural attitudes, norms and behaviours that disfavour the economic and social advancement of single women.

It is therefore clear that opportunities to address the structural and systemic barriers that marginalize women in comparison to men in conflict settings must be explored. To all member states and donor agencies, women's empowerment for sustainable development should enshrine and prioritise the following core feminist aspects;

- Embrace a full cycle approach to feminist-oriented human socio-economic development within the context of conflict and post-conflict recovery. The approach should be human-centred and should put women at the centre, carefully building their agency and restoring their dignity to engage as actors rather than as beneficiaries and making a full cycle linkage from the personal through to the community and national to the international level.
- Enhancing women's capabilities and skills, encompassing political, economic, and social dimensions, is crucial. The process of capacity and skills building should commence with existing knowledge, integrating learning, reflection, action, lobbying, and further reflection. The cycle of reflection and dialogue plays a pivotal role in elevating women's consciousness, identity, and confidence, acting as a catalyst for the re-evaluation and redefinition of struggles and alternatives. Actions should ensure that all development and training initiatives encompass all aspects of a woman's life and respond to their physical, psychological, social, economic and spiritual needs within the socio-political environment, thus ensuring that they gain the necessary knowledge, skills and experience required to ensure that they develop.
- The bodies of women serve as sanctuaries of peace, paying homage to the mind and spirit. They constitute the primary avenue through which women engage socially, economically, politically, spiritually, and creatively in society. These bodies mark the starting point for the practical application of rights, the space where rights are exercised, and unfortunately, especially for women, where rights are frequently violated. Without healing of body, mind and spirit women's empowerment cannot be achieved.
- Women's economic empowerment should extend beyond numerical targets. While achieving parity between women and men and targeted programmes are good practices for women's economic empowerment, it is more important to move beyond numbers and achieve women's substantial and meaningful participation. Furthermore, the economic empowerment of women does not in any way imply disempowerment of men as there are enough resources for both women and men.
- Empowering women should steer clear of grouping and essentializing them into a one-size-fits-all approach. Not all women are mothers or wives, and each woman has her unique agenda and mission. Women constitute a highly diverse group engaged in various fields, each bringing distinct contributions, talents, skills, thoughts, and knowledge to the broader struggle.

In light of the above, Women's International Peace Centre calls for a blend of transformative approaches that will further facilitate the transition to sustainable peace and development. All Member States are called upon to:

- Significantly cut back on military expenditure and divert more resources to financing commitments towards women's economic empowerment such as

infrastructure development and trade incentives. Militarism only serves to uphold and perpetuate structural inequalities that in turn operate to disenfranchise women and girls from public goods, entrenching exclusion and marginalization.

- Empower and work directly with community women peace builders and women organizations to strengthen their capacity to monitor and respond to the increasing threats posed by violent extremist groups and human traffickers. Emphasis should be geared towards supporting local women to harness their own local home grown solutions for peace.
 - Specifically in Africa, women's empowerment should put more emphasis on improving women's livelihoods, economic interventions and reparations for survivors of violence especially in post-conflict communities. Without immediate economic empowerment, women and girls quickly descend into more high-risk work like survival sex.
 - Re-align all national laws and policies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals especially goals 10, 5 and 16 as a way of fast-tracking women's economic empowerment. The goals hold the promise of a more just world and achieving them is going to require committed top national and international leadership. Furthermore, strengthen reporting on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 National Action Plans to fast-track national commitments to women's socio-economic empowerment in post-conflict settings.
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